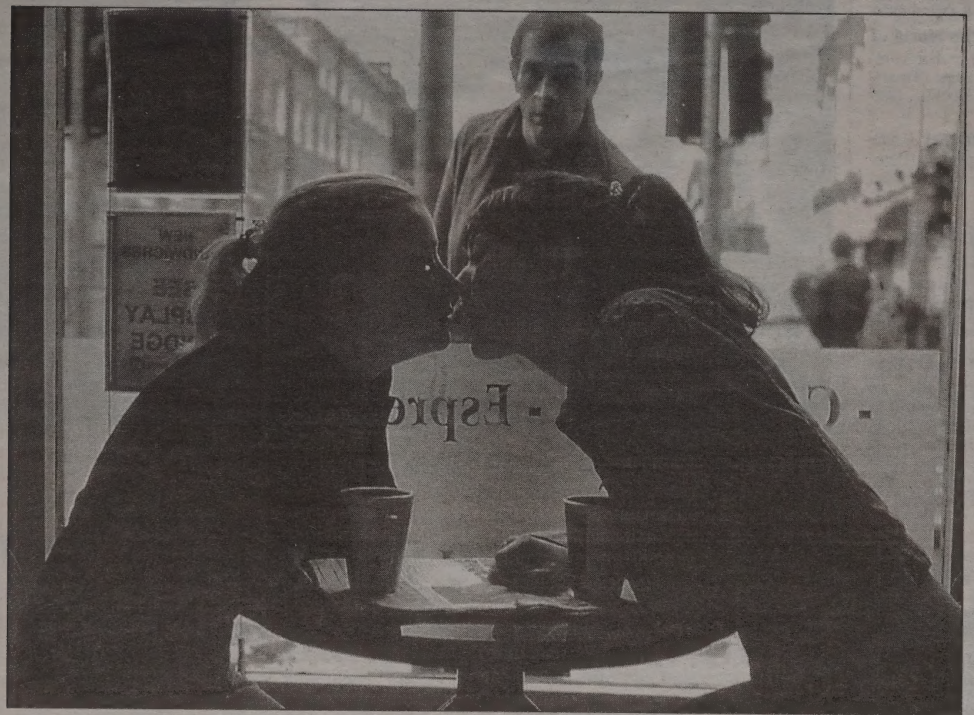

COURTESY LAVENDER FILM FESTIVAL

'GOLDFISH MEMORY': Fiona O'Shaughnessy, left, Sean Campion and Fiona Glascott star in the Irish comedy.

Lavender Film Festival all about relationships

By **ANDREW WINEKE**
THE GAZETTE

Relationships — straight, gay, lesbian and others — are the theme at the fifth annual Pikes Peak Lavender Film Festival, which begins today and runs through Sunday at the Fine Arts Center.

From an 18th-century South African tale of two prisoners falling in love in "Proteus" to "Tying the Knot," a documentary on gay marriage that is the must-see movie in the lineup, the Lavender Film Festival has collected a diverse collection of movies looking at gay, lesbian and bisexual love both seriously and humorously.

"We tried to get a big variety," says festival director Alma Cremonesi. "We got a lot of comments last year that people wanted more romance, more comedies."

Here's a roundup of the films:

TODAY

6:30 p.m. Reception
7:30 p.m. Introductions
8 p.m.: "Goldfish Memory" B-

A group of friends goes through the time-honored traditions of meeting and mating, fighting and fretting. The title comes from the notion that a goldfish has a 3-second-

No closets

LAVENDER: 'Tying the Knot' timely, thought-provoking

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Caleb because she thinks he wants Marc. Sure, the love story is contrived and silly, and the acting in writer/director Q. Allan Brocka's first feature is spotty, but the dialogue is often smart and funny. (2004, U.S., 1 hour, 30 minutes. Preceded by the short "Seventy," 2003, U.S., 8 minutes.)

4:15 p.m. A group discussion on the Lavender Film Festival's first five years.

5:15 p.m.: "Proteus" C-

There's a love story in here somewhere dying to get out: The story, based on a real incident in 1735 in South Africa, in which a Dutch sailor and a black Hottentot were discovered having sex at a prison colony and sentenced to death by drowning. Although we see the two men meet, and there's plenty of sex, their 10-year-long relationship is depicted as nearly abusive and only at the end is there any warmth between the lovers. (2003, South Africa, 1 hour, 40 minutes. English and Afrikaans with subtitles. Preceded by the short "Straight in the Face," 2002, Canada, 12 minutes.)

7:30 p.m.: "Mango Kiss" C

Two young women move to San Francisco looking for love, but fall for each other instead, only to commit to an open relationship that quickly causes more trouble than it's worth. With an appealing cast, a good soundtrack and bold voice-overs from the heroine, Lou, "Mango Kiss" promises a more exciting ride than it delivers. (2003, U.S., 1 hour, 20 minutes. Preceded by the short "Little Black Boot," 2003, U.S., 16 minutes.)

SUNDAY

Noon: "Lily Festival" D

In Japan, an elderly man moves into an apartment complex filled with retired women and goes about wooing them all. The racy plot line — particularly in a society and an age group that's usually depicted as sexless — is a promising premise. Most of the movie, though, is filled with the group of grandmothers cooking treats for their new beau and bickering about their cats. And the denouement arrives with more of a thud than a splash. (2001, Japan, 1 hour, 40 minutes, Japanese with English subtitles. Preceded by the short "You Fake," 2003, Canada, 7 minutes.)

2:30 p.m.: "Callas Forever" C+

Directed by Franco Zeffirelli and starring Jeremy Irons, this fantasy is the big-budget entry in the festival. It imagines that during her last days in the 1970s, opera great Maria Callas (Fanny Ardant) reunited with former manager Larry Kelly (Irons), who persuades her to lip-sync "Carmen" for a film version of the opera. Ardant's Callas is such a diva that viewers might wonder why anyone would go to the trouble, but opera fans may, like Kelly in the film, be enamored of the fiction that Callas' greatness survived the end of her career. (2002, Italy, France, Spain, U.K., Romania, 1 hour, 48 minutes, English. Preceded by the short "Annie Dearest: The Real Miracle Worker," 2002, U.S., 5 minutes.)

5 p.m.: "Tying the Knot" A

This affecting documentary on gay marriage presents its case with a straightforward, no-nonsense style. Clips of gay marriage supporters and opponents — including Focus on the Family's James Dobson — are interspersed with stories of homosexual men and women wrestling with the legal consequences of not being able to marry.

The film spends the most time with Mickie, a policewoman denied her partner's pension after her partner is killed in the line of duty, but the more interesting story is that of redneck Oklahoma rancher Sam, who loses his farm and has to sell his horses after his partner Earl's death. (2004, U.S., 1 hour, 27 minutes. Preceded by the short "One Wedding and a Revolution," 2004, U.S., 11 minutes.)

7 p.m.: "Straight Jacket" B+

Verbal repartee and Technicolor hues highlight this quick-witted comedy about Guy Stone, a boorish 1950s movie star forced to get married after being photographed at a gay club. Playing off classic Hollywood stereotypes, the movie is lightweight fun up until its heartfelt but heavy-handed ending. (2004, U.S., 1 hour, 36 minutes. Preceded by the short "TV Dream Homes: The Drawings of Mark Bennett," 2001, U.S., 15 minutes.)